

Mobility *moves on*

Increasingly, as the workforce increasingly becomes mobile, we are seeking to have all the applications that we are used to having at our desk at our fingertips when we are out of the office as well.



Chris Barrow of Avaya

The fast pace of the digital age means that in order to get ahead, people are seeking out the tools that allow them to do their jobs as quickly and efficiently as possible. As times have demanded an increasingly mobile workforce, both the popularity and acceptance of consumer applications in the workplace have grown. As a result, what we're seeing is that many employees are now using consumer devices, such as the iPhone, in a workplace environment. There is no doubt that this is a step in the right direction for any company striving to achieve the ultimate 'mobile workforce' but today's technologies give businesses the opportunity to push the boundaries way beyond mobile email and voice calls, without them having to worry about how it will impact on the bottom line.

From a business perspective, mobility ensures that employees are working as efficiently as possible. With flexible working comes higher productivity through extended business hours, and an increase in responsiveness. According to The Yankee Group, employees with access to unified and intelligent communications technologies can improve productivity by 15-20 per cent per day.

Chris Barrow, Solutions Marketing Manager, Avaya, points out the benefits.

"The benefits of this for employees and businesses are clear; rather than running separate and disparate devices, employees now have the ability to run just one communications channel regardless of whether they are based in the office or out on the road. An IP PBX system, such as Avaya Aura Communication Manager, allows employees to use whichever device they want, whether it's a mobile, desk, or soft phone on their laptop and makes it possible to run all of them efficiently by giving them just one number for all devices, one voice mail, and access to all of the features they have become accustomed to on their desk phone – such as call forwarding and conferencing – on their mobile.

"As well as having the choice of any device, Avaya's solutions, such as one-X Mobile, are designed make it even quicker and easier to gain access to all the functionality of your office phone via an intuitive graphical user interface, which can be set up on your desk computer or laptop. Not only does the unified communications client enhance the productivity of enterprise mobile workers, but it supports over 500 mobile devices ranging from high-end smart phones to lower-end feature phones, enabling compatibility regardless of the mobile devices deployed or wireless networks used."

Mobility and hosted telephony

The hosted telephony providers are starting to make a valid point that telephony is but one of a number of applications that can be hosted and provided to users via their channel partners. At the same time, people like Steve Tutt, Marketing Manager at VanillaIP, are also pointing out their differentiation when it comes to the services they can provide.

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Mini Case Study

Dave Beaton, IT Director at construction company Midas Group use VanillaIP hosted telephony and their FMC solution. Here's a quick summary of the installation.

- 90 x Nokia SIP/Wi-Fi users – most of these also have VanillaIP desk phones but use Nokia SIP when 'roaming'
- 8 x regional offices and 50 x construction sites – these have the same WEP key so the 90 users can walk into any site in the UK and make calls
- Beaton has not precisely calculated his call cost savings yet but has seen his mobile bill drop 25-30% but thinks the savings across the board will be a little less than that.
- Midas also sees this as a good home worker option, where the user connects to their home Wi-Fi. This gives them a Midas extension at home without needing an IP phone. Beaton says he expects this to be a good option when everyone is sent home because of swine flu!

Tutt says that Broadsoft are building SIP clients for all the major mobile platforms and that one thing they do use a lot of is the SIP capability in the Nokia N and E series, Nokia's business range.

"This allows the user to enter their VanillaIP authentication details and make the Nokia function as a VanillaIP desk phone whenever their Nokia mobile is in a Wi-Fi zone. The outbound calls are charged at landline rates and the outbound call presents the called party the user's desk phone DDI as CallerID

"Naturally, the two major advantages are cost savings by bypassing mobile charges and increased mobility. A big advantage is that the whole process is transparent for the user, they don't need to open an app or dial differently etc., they just make a call as normal and the phone routes the call over the Wi-Fi."

Size issues

Alan Elston, Panasonic Solutions Consultant believes mobile devices have real issues when it comes to screen size and what applications can be used.

"Mobility applications are now able to empower the external work force to perform more complex tasks and have far more visibility of and interaction with office-based colleagues than simple mobile phone communications previously allowed.

"Unfortunately, the extent to which such applications can be utilised is limited somewhat by the physical presentation possible through compact mobile devices. Specifically, the intentionally small-scale screen and keyboard of mobile devices can work against the usability of a visual applications where anything more than short and simple text messages or basic graphical information is delivered.

Increasing the physical scale to compensate would of course work against the mobility of such devices.

"However, the Mobile Communication Assistant tool soon to be made available from Panasonic provides the highest achievable level of presentation to mobile devices, delivering clear graphical PC desktop facilities such as contact speed dialling, presence, voice and instant messaging plus IP camera integration over the 3G or GPRS networks.

This ultimately means further enhancing the capabilities of mobile devices to incorporate telephony functions common to office workers in a realistic and affordable manner without suffering the usual problems of display size."

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